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BELL WANTS TO TALK WITH KING SLAYER

Attorney general might pay Ray for the 'truth'

By GEORGE ANTHONY

Of The Register's Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Atty. Gen. Griffin Bell said Thursday that he would like to personally "sit down and talk" with James Earl Ray, the convicted killer of Martin Luther King, Jr., in order to clear up his own misgivings about the case.

Bell said, "I'd like to have some answers, as an American citizen," and emphasized he doubts if Ray could have obtained money and travel documents if he had not been aided in the crime by other persons.

Bell also said that if he is convinced Ray would tell the truth, he might not oppose a payment or "consideration" to Ray from the federal government in exchange for information on possible accomplices.

Ray's lawyer, James Lesar, said he would advise his client not to submit to an interview. "The best and only way to protect James Earl Ray's rights is by seeing that he gets a new trial," Lesar said.

Bell said he has no plans to order an official Justice Department re-opening of the King murder case, and added that any action would await resolution of the current congressional squabble over investigating the King assassination.

A major review by the Justice Department has concluded that the FBI's inquiry into King's death was "thoroughly, honestly and successfully conducted," and that the best available evidence suggests that Ray acted alone. The results of that review were released by the department last week.

"I'd Like to Know..."

But Bell, in a breakfast meeting with reporters Thursday, said: "I'd like to talk to Ray. I'd like to know where he got his money. And I don't think we're going to find out except from Ray."

Bell said that Ray is a state prisoner in Tennessee and that there are no immediate plans to set up a meeting between King's convicted killer and the attorney general.

Bell said that if he personally did not interview Ray, "I'd like to have one of my people skilled in interrogation, in sizing up a person, talk to him."

Bell noted reports that Ray obtained funds with which to obtain cars and weapons and with which to flee the Memphis murder scene through a series of robberies.

"But there's been no evidence of robberies," he said. Ray went to Canada, then to England after the murder, and he was arrested in London on June 8, 1968.

Questions Intelligence

Bell said he questions whether a person who spent much of his life in prisons (Ray escaped from the Missouri state penitentiary in 1967 while serving a 20-year sentence for armed robbery) would have the intelligence to obtain needed travel documents by himself.

Bell said, "I have travelled some and I know the difficulties involved." The attorney general said he asked that he be provided with Ray's intelligence quotient (IQ).

Ray currently is serving a 99-year sentence at Brushy Mountain Prison in Petros, Tenn.